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Select Committee on Assassinations

U.S. House of Representatives

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

WORKING MEMORANDUM

BOB: At least three interesting points in here: 1) Fiorini admits being propositioned by Barker for a "domestic assassination"; this indicates the subject might have been Ray. 2) The credibility of Silvia Odio is further enhanced. 3) The necessity of getting someone knowledgeable to rake Lopez-Fresquet with a fine toothcomb concerning everyone he was ever in contact with around the time of the initial Bishop-Veciana contact. I feel he must be approached with patient obliquity. The first interview was screwed up and is an embarrassment on the Committee's record. (The interviewer didn't even know who Carlos Prio was.)



009005

MEMORANDUM - June 28, 1978

TO: G. Robert Blakey

FROM: Fonzi & Gonzales

RE: Interview with MANOLO RAY RIVERO
dob: June 13, 1924

Manolo Ray was interviewed on June 7, 1978, in the offices of Ray and Associates, Engineering Consultants, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Background file research indicates that Ray received a graduate scholarship from the Cuban Ministry of Public Works in 1947 to study civil engineering at the University of Utah. He returned to Cuba in 1949 and was appointed a designer for the Cuban National Development Corporation and then chief of its structural department in charge of bridges and highways. In 1952 he became project manager for Frederick Snare Corporation of New York in construction of the Havana Hilton Hotel. In May, 1957, he organized the Civic Resistance Movement (MRC), an underground organization which supervised acts of sabotage against the Batista regime. Following the Revolution, Ray was appointed Minister of Public Works by Castro in February, 1959. He officially resigned his position in November, 1959.

During the interview, Ray said that he had been active in anti-Castro activity, organizing underground activity in Havana, prior to his resignation as Minister of Public Works. His brother, who reportedly later committed suicide, had been arrested by Castro in March of 1959 for counter-revolutionary activity. Ray said his anti-Castro activity eventually led to his founding the Revolutionary Movement of the People (MRP) around May of 1960. Among those Ray mentioned as being also instrumental in the founding of the MRP were Rufo Lopez-Fresquet and Rogelio Cisneros.

When asked, Ray said there were no Americans involved in the founding of the MRP. He said, however, that there was one who had been active with him in anti-Batista operations and later gave him support for his anti-Castro activities. His name was Ira Wolfe. "He was very close to me personally and we considered him like a Cuban," Ray said. At the time, Wolfe was a sales representative for a kitchen equipment firm and married to a Cuban. After he left Cuba, he was divorced and went to work for what Ray described as a telephone company-related firm in Texas. He died there about five years ago at about 55 years old. Ray described Wolfe as tall, heavily built, with black hair and a round face.

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Although Ray said he was not as close to him as he was to Ira Wolfe, another man who provided anti-Castro support and was active on his own in anti-Castro activity was Wolfe's brother-in-law, the brother of his Cuban wife. Ray said he didn't at the moment remember his first name, but his last name was Rosello. Ray said he had known him for a number of years because he worked for a firm that sold ceramic tile and that he had sold the tile for the tunnel through Havana which Ray had been in charge of building in the mid-'50s. Rosello, said Ray, was somehow involved in the sale of weapons to Israel. Ray believes that Wolfe's ex-wife, Angela Rosello, may be living in the Miami area.

Ray said he had been in touch with individuals connected with the American Embassy in Havana both before and after the Castro Revolution. One contact he recalls was with Jim Knoel, the first of which was around September, 1958. Ray said Knoel told him that he represented an agency interested in intelligence and propaganda and he wanted to exchange ideas and information concerning the 26th of July Movement. Ray said he seemed particularly interested in whether or not there any Communists with Castro in the Sierra Maestra.

After the Revolution, Ray said, he received another request to meet with Knoel about the time he went underground with anti-Castro activities. That was a general meeting about what was happening at the time but it resulted in the setting up of a channel for the passing of messages between them later. Ray said that Knoel did not offer him any financial support at the time, but he later promised equipment which was supposed to be air dropped to MRP guerillas in the Escambray mountains. The equipment never arrived and Knoel later told him there was a "mix up," said Ray.

Ray said he was unfamiliar with and had no contact with David Phillips or Col. Sam Kail at the American Embassy.

Ray said he first met Antonio Veciana in Puerto Rico after Veciana came into exile. Although Veciana was a member of his MRP movement at the time, Ray said that Veciana's attempt to assassinate Castro in October, 1961, in Havana was not officially planned or sanctioned by the Movement. Ray explained that, as the leader of the MRP, he did not believe that leadership assassination should be a key part of the Movement's strategy. He said it had too many "bad aspects" to it as a strategy, the principal one being it misled the members of the movement into believing that the movement would be successful as soon as the opposition leader was removed. That, said Ray, has a "weakening effect" on a movement's over-all strategy and the reason why he never

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sponsored a plan to assassinate Castro. "However," said Ray, "that doesn't mean we should not take the opportunity to do so if it arises."

Ray said that, although he never met Veciana in Cuba, he knew of him and his support of the MRP at the time. "I know that he was very close to Rufo Lopez-Fresquet, the Minister of Finance, and that he was working at the bank and that through Lopez-Fresquet he was able to get some contributions to the Movement. I know he was very active."

Ray said that he heard through the underground that Veciana was planning the Castro assassination attempt and that he had gotten a bazooka for it. He later heard that Veciana himself had left Cuba the day before the assassination attempt and that he later gave the excuse that he had to help some people escape in a boat and that he had to jump into the boat himself to do so. "The story was that the attempt failed because of the confusion that followed after he left," said Ray.

Ray said that there was no indication at the time that an American was behind Veciana's planning of the assassination attempt. He knew of no American that Veciana might have been associating with at the time. Ray said he could not identify Maurice Bishop, nor did his characteristics or sketch resemble anyone he knew, although he said there was some resemblance to a U.S. government official he met in Tampa when he first arrived in exile. He said he met at least four government officials in Tampa while being put up in a motel there, but he wasn't told whether they were CIA or FBI. Ray said he doesn't recall even the name given to him of the one who resembled Bishop and he doesn't recall that it was "Bishop."

What Ray does recall about his initial debriefing in Tampa when he entered the U.S. in October or November, 1960, was that he was eventually told that a Mr. Frank Bender wanted to talk with him. Bender then arrived and he had a long conference with him. Ray said he got the impression that Bender was mostly interested in his philosophy about how Cuba should be governed after the overthrow of Castro, but Ray said he found it a bit strange that Bender was specifically interested in the future of the King Ranch in Ray's vision of the future of Cuba. "I don't think he liked my answer too much," said Ray, "because I told him that the most important thing was to develop the overall economy of the country and that, although I had nothing against the King Ranch, they would have to contribute more to the economy of the country. I don't think he liked that answer too much."

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(When asked, Ray said he was not familiar with the name of Jack Malone who, according to a file review, was associated with the King Ranch in Cuba.)

Ray said he subsequently had a number of meetings with Bender in Miami, a few of which concerned his and the MRP's joining of the united Frente prior to the Bay of Pigs invasion. Ray was asked if he was aware at the time of the opposition of the CIA's political liaison, E. Howard Hunt, to his joining the Frente. [In his book, Give Us This Day, Hunt points to Ray's joining the Frente as one of the key reasons he resigned his position.] Ray said he was not specifically aware of Hunt's opposition to him at the time. He said, in fact, that he never met E. Howard Hunt, or "Eduardo," but knew only that the CIA's "Golden Boy," as he was known, Manolo Artime, had the personal support of a very influential and powerful government official whom, Ray said he later found out, was Hunt.

Ray said that Hunt's portrayal of him in his book and of his relationship to the Frente was misleading. Ray said he was not anxious to join the Frente and that he resisted doing so for some time. "We were in touch with the leaders of the front at the time," said Ray, "people like Tony Verona, and we told them, why should we join and be so restrained as you, why should we want to become part of the situation just to be like a poker chip with somebody else running the show and not knowing what you are fighting for?" Ray also said that because his group was so well organized within Cuba at the time and had deep underground penetration, some other exile Cuban groups were also not anxious to welcome him in the front because they were afraid he would take control of it.

Ray said opposition to him also came from certain influential and wealthy anti-Castro Americans who saw the Frente as a "social club" where they could have influence and, if successful, reap their benefits later in Cuba. He specifically cited William Pawley as one such. Ray said he met Pawley only once. "At the time," he said, "there was a lot of heavy propaganda against us going around Miami. They were saying 'Fidelissimo sin Fidel' and that type of thing, accusing us of being Communists. One of the members of our organization happened to have an office close to Pawley's and got to meet him and then arranged a meeting between us. So I went to meet him. It was very interesting because I found the man very arrogant. We started discussing Cuba and the future of Cuba and so forth, and then he said he was going to be sincere with me. He said he believed that when Fidel was overthrown it would be better if I were assassinated and that somebody might just do it."

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Ray also revealed another instance concerning mention of assassinating him. That was shortly after March, 1961, and the formation of the Cuban Revolutionary Council was announced, with Ray as a key member. Ray said he had a very close friend who had been a detective under Batista and had also had contact with the FBI both before and after the Revolution. Ray characterized the friend as "a very honest man," despite the fact he worked under Batista, and one he trusted. After the Council was announced, Ray said, this friend called him and told him he had been at a meeting composed of former members of Batista's Bureau of Investigation, called BRAC, which Ray characterized as "a repressive organization." Ray said: "One of those at this meeting in this house in Miami told my friend that they believed that Castro was going to be overthrown by the United States and that since I was getting too much power, they should eliminate me. My friend warned me that I should be careful. He said they made mention of using an American to do the job of killing me instead of a Cuban. Even now I do not know if the CIA had anything to do with that, or whether it was just this group of Batistianos." Ray said that at the time he was told that the leader of the group was named Faget (first name unrecollected), who is now dead. (Ray said he believes his son is working for U.S. Customs in Miami.)

Ray said he had heard of Frank Fiorini about that time but he never met him. "I heard of Fiorini," he said, "and I was told that he was something like an adventurer, a man of action with many contacts, but I had no direct knowledge of him. He was involved more with the Batistianos." Ray said he knows of no relationship between E. Howard Hunt and Frank Fiorini at the time.

Concerning the Castro assassination attempt in Chile in 1971 organized by Antonio Veciana, Ray said he was not associated with it nor did he know of anyone, except for Veciana himself, involved with it who had previously worked with him. He was told, however, that Luis Posada may have been involved, and he remembers Posada as someone Cisneros once recruited for an infiltration mission into Cuba. "Later," said Ray, "I found out he was so close to the CIA I decided not to use him anymore." Ray said he does not know Lucilo Pena or his involvement in the Chile attempt.

Speculating as to who could have introduced Maurice Bishop to Veciana, Ray said there is the possibility that Rufo Lopez-Fresquet could have been the link without knowing it. "Rufo is a good friend of mine," said Ray, "but he

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usually talks too much to be directly involved in clandestine activity. But at the time Rufo had very close association with high government officials and the CIA and I know that he and Veciana were very good friends and in the same business sphere. I would say he may have mentioned Veciana's name to some of those people and they contacted Veciana as a result, knowing from Rufo of Veciana's feelings about Castro."

Ray's feelings toward Veciana took a negative turn in 1972, he said, when he was organizing the Parte Partido Revolucionario de Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Party) in Puerto Rico. This was, said Ray, a great effort to reinvigorate the anti-Castro movement. Ray said that Veciana wanted to become part of the group. "At that time," said Ray, "we knew he was working in Bolivia and traveling around Latin America and we thought he could be of help to us." Ray said that Veciana promised that he could get \$10,000 to contribute to the movement, but the money was never produced. "Almost as soon as he joined," said Ray, "he began participating in an attempt to divide the movement. He made a declaration accusing us of being in consortment with Castro and he knew that was a lie. Everything he said was just so unbelievable and he had things printed about me in Replica accusing me of everything. He just made everything up." Ray blames Veciana for the lack of success of the movement and says he does not understand why he attacked him. Basically, he said, he believes Veciana is an opportunist.

Ray was asked if he was familiar with the Moa Bay Mining Company. He said he was. He recalls a meeting around June, 1959, when he was still in Castro's cabinet. "We would meet at the Banco International every Thursday in the afternoon with a group that dealt with the economic problems of the new government," he said. "Lopez-Fresquet was the Finance Minister at the time. At one meeting, I remember Regino Boti, who was Minister of Economics, said that the people from Moa Bay had contacted him to see what could be done with the government to re-establish their operation. They had about a \$70 million investment. But Castro said not to deal with them because they had worked too close with the Batista government."

Ray was asked if he remembered where he was on November 22, 1963. Around that time, he said, he was spending most of his time in Puerto Rico but flying regularly to various countries in Latin America. The day that Kennedy was killed, he said, he was at a JURE meeting in Caracas. Group leaders from various countries were there, he said, and he remembers the assistant to the President of Venezuela coming in after lunch with the news that President Kennedy was shot.

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Ray said he also recalls that Rogelio Cisneros was at that JURE meeting. When told that a file review revealed that Cisneros was reportedly scheduled to be involved in a pick-up of a cache of arms on Regaldo Cay on November 23, 1963, a date which was changed to November 25th at the last minute, Ray said he recalled generally such an operation. "We had a boat in Costa Rica and we were supposed to pick up some weapons there but there was a mix up. I can't recall the details or the date exactly," he said. "Actually, Cisneros was the coordinator of such operations. I was informed of them, but he was the direct coordinator after they were improved."

Ray was asked about his relationship with Andrew St. George who, according to file review, was with him on an attempted infiltration into Cuba. "I think I first met him in Havana," said Ray, "when he passed through there on the way to the Sierra Maestras to see Castro. I met him several times later when I came into exile and we exchanged information and ideas. He has something about him, a sincerity, that I like."

Ray said he was not aware of the close relationship between Andrew St. George and Mitchell Livingston WerBell III. Asked if he had ever had any dealings with WerBell, Ray said: "The sunavabitch. I would like to punch him in the nose, if you will forgive my saying that." Ray said his feelings about WerBell are based on an incident that happened in the Dominican Republic in 1965. At the time, after two failures, a final major infiltration operation into Cuba was being planned. "This was to be the first of a series of long and slow steps to build a permanent opposition movement against Castro inside Cuba. This was supposed to be a very significant operation, not just another quick raid." Ray said he had already had his share of problems with the operation before his encounter with WerBell. Originally it was to be based out of Costa Rica, but political problems developed there and he had to move the operation out. He made arrangements to send the infiltration boat, the Venus, on to the Dominican Republic with its crew to set up a base there. Meanwhile, a supply of arms that were especially fabricated for JURE in California were seized in California. (They had been financed, said Ray, by a major "Buy-A-Rifle-For-\$92" campaign among Cuban exiles; more than \$100,000 was raised.) Then came the revolution in the Dominican Republic and the appearance on the scene of Mitchell WerBell. Ray said he frantically made arrangements with the Venezuelan government to move his base of operations there and sent \$750 of his personal money to the crew of the Venus for fuel to move the boat as quickly as possible to Venezuela and out from between the warring factions in the Dominican Republic. However,

what he later discovered, Ray said, was that WerBell was conspiring with his boat's crew, and mainly its leader, Jose Rabell, to convince them to go to Miami with the boat instead of Venezuela. That, of course, aborted the infiltration operation. "That's how WerBell stole our boat from us," said Ray. "After that our whole effort to get going again failed. By that time I was completely broke." Ray said he never did find out why WerBell was in the Dominican Republic or why he stole the boat from them. "I believe he was a CIA man," said Ray. Ray said he eventually wound up giving the boat to Nino Diaz for his anti-Castro operations.

Ray was asked about the incident concerning the visit of "Leon Oswald" to Silvia Odio. Ray said that when he was first questioned about it by the FBI, he was asked mostly about his feelings about her reliability and accuracy. "They told me that she said she had met Oswald," he said. "I don't remember them telling me that the men who came to her said they were members of JURE and were interested in buying arms. I don't think that was told to me. I told them that I knew she had some domestic problems and that she was under emotional strain from her divorce when she was living here in Puerto Rico, but I told them I would say she was sane. I think she was a good person, a very bright person and a sane person."

Ray was asked if he was ever told that Silvia Odio's sister also saw the three men who visited her apartment. He seemed surprised. "I never did know that!" he said. "That to me has a lot of bearing. They never did tell me that. This is the first time I learned about that."

Ray said that at the time he knew of no members of JURE going through Dallas in search of money or arms. He does not recall anyone by the name of Leopoldo or Angelo associated with JURE at the time. Ray said he had no American contacts in Dallas or major financial support from anyone there.

Ray also said he did not recognize or had no association with individuals of the following names: Justin McCarthy, Bernardo DeTorres, Sam Acosta, Larrie Schmidt, Robert Morris, Tony Sforza, Warren Frank and David Morales. He also said he had no association with Laureano Batista, but heard that Frank Fiorini was working with him at one time.